



**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
JOHN McHUGH, NEW YORK
CHAIRMAN**

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Statement of Chairman John M. McHugh
Hearing on Criteria for Awards and Decorations

WASHINGTON, D.C. – I am pleased to hold this hearing today to discuss valor awards and decorations for our service members. Let me first say that I am continuously amazed at the heroic and self sacrificing actions by the young men and women of our military who are serving during the ongoing war against terrorism. They are true heroes and it is important that we recognize them for their valor with the proper and timely conference of the appropriate awards and decoration.

I know the Department of Defense (DOD) is currently conducting a comprehensive review of military awards. That's a good first step; however, I also think it is important that we discuss here today some of the issues and concerns that have been raised recently regarding valor awards. In addition, it's appropriate for DOD to learn from today's testimony as part of that process. During today's hearing we will focus, in part, on the standards for the award of the Medal of Honor.

During the current global war on terrorism there has been no lack of valorous actions. For example, the nation's second highest valor awards – the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross and the Air Force Cross – have been presented to 26 personnel. However, since the end of the Vietnam War only four men have been awarded the Medal of Honor, all for actions that cost them their lives: 2 in Somalia and 2 in Iraq.

This recent trend of the award of the Medal of Honor only to those who have died, contrasts with our experience in other wars. For example, during World War II, 43 per cent of the persons awarded the Medal of Honor survived their actions during the Korean War, 28 percent; and during the Vietnam

War, 62 per cent. Given this past history, I am concerned that the military services recently may have introduced more stringent criteria into the Medal of Honor awards process than has existed in the past.

Other seeming anomalies exist in the current valor awards process. During the global war on terrorism, the Army has awarded the Distinguished Service Cross to just four deserving soldiers. During that same period, the Navy Cross has been awarded to 14 Marines and 6 Navy personnel, while the Air Force Cross has been awarded to two of its personnel. This statistic is not raised to question the validity of any of the awards made, but rather to help focus the subcommittee on the key objectives of this hearing. Some of the issues we will examine are:

- Whether the current system for valor awards and decorations consistently provides service members the appropriate level of award or decoration that is merited by their actions;
- Whether the military services are consistently applying the criteria for these awards;
- Whether the criteria for awards and decorations for valor are consistent with those used during past wars and conflicts.

We also want to ensure that the awards process is being conducted in a timely and efficient manner. I have been told that it often takes over two years for a valor award to be approved and that, as a result, awards are being presented well after service members have left active duty. This is an issue which may particularly impact the reserve components.

Finally, because Congress has established in law a process for the military services to retrospectively review initial award recommendations or recommendations for the upgrade of an award, we want to understand better how that process is working.

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